



Editorial

Taking Stock(holm): Time to Up Our Game?

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The International Evidence Based Library and Information Practice Conference Safari Continues

First the Elephant, Sheffield (2001), a lumbering ungainly creature which, with characteristic short sightedness, sought only to target the U.K. health library audience. Next on the scene, the fast-moving Leopard, Edmonton (2003), renowned for its ability to inhabit diverse habitats, exemplified by participants from several academic sectors. Third, the Brisbane Lion (2005), letting out a mighty roar as, enlisting the support of the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), it issued a rallying call to the profession at large. Simultaneously, the EBLIP movement gained its own powerful voice with launch of the *EBLIP* journal. Fourth, the relentless charge of the mighty Rhinoceros in North Carolina (2007), with the muscle of major hide-bound U.S. professional associations lending not inconsiderable impetus to uptake of EBLIP. Finally, Stockholm (2009), the Buffalo, with its keen eyesight, farsighted in planning and wide-

ranging in identifying issues of concern to the profession.

A decade ago, in a famous seasonal offering from the *British Medical Journal* (*BMJ*), a correspondent likened the big five medical journals (*BMJ*, *Lancet*, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, *New England Journal of Medicine* and *Journal of the American Medical Association* (*JAMA*)) to the “big five” African game animals (Loefler, 1998). With the EBLIP international conference series accumulating its own “big five”, completed by the welcome addition of Stockholm in July 2009, it is fitting to review the safari so far travelled. Hopefully our extended metaphor is not as contrived as other big fives suggested by *BMJ* correspondents – you were spared a Spice Girls comparison (Abbasi, 1998) – it does however provide a backdrop against which to take stock of the EBLIP movement and its challenges. As one of four participants to have attended all five conferences (for the record the others are Alison Brett, Anne Brice and Jonathan Eldredge), I am privileged to outline

some challenges posed by the most recent contribution to the conference series.

In his interactive plenary session, “Bridging the Gaps: Linking our EBLIP Questions to our Decisions”, a first for the EBLIP Conference series, Dr. Jonathan Eldredge encouraged us to identify questions from our practice.

Acknowledging that formulating the question is one thing, while sustaining momentum to answer it is another, Jonathan shared the concept of Virtual Peer mentoring and encouraged us to pursue such peer support beyond the spatial and temporal constraints of the conference timeframe. Such interactivity is difficult to capture via the medium of prose but Jonathan himself attempts to distil some of his thinking though his commentary in this issue of *EBLIP*.

Appropriately, this spirit of collegiality and community was strengthened by “Bridging the Gap between Users and Systems – the Potential Contribution of Social Informatics to Evidence Based Library and Information Practice”, delivered by Dr. Anita Mirijamdotter. It was stimulating to reflect on the complexity of library and information problems – after all, the real world is much more messy than the rational logic of evidence based practice might imply! I have resolved to revisit the Soft Systems Methodology approaches I first encountered when studying for my Master’s to see how these might relate to the initial stage of formulating a question. I therefore commend Anita’s commentary, also in this issue, for your attention.

A special award of “chocolates on the pillow” goes to Professor Sue McKnight for an insightful presentation, “Bridging the Gap between Service Provision and Customer Expectations”. Sue’s work has figured prominently in previous issues of *EBLIP* and she certainly met, and indeed exceeded, the expectations of this particular customer. We thought that it might be interesting to offer a joint commentary making explicit links between Sue’s cutting edge work and current thinking on evidence based library and information practice.

A well respected figure from Scandinavia academia, Birgitta Olander, asked us to consider the implications of the need for skills in handling, interpreting and implementing research in her plenary session, “Bridging the Skills Gap – Shaping the Information Professional of the Future”. It was invaluable to be able to locate the small but expanding ripples of the EBLIP movement within the wider, and sometimes engulfing, currents within which planning for the future workforce necessarily takes place. Do make a point of visiting Birgitta’s commentary elsewhere in this issue.

Armed with a store of pebbles with which to rattle a game animal’s cage came Ola Pilerot with his provocative offering, “Conditions for Research use in Library and Information Practice – A Matter of Learning”. Ola made good use of a research use versus evidence based practice dialectic around which to construct his argument. It was a presentation that demanded a response from the EBLIP community and I have been happy to attempt to respond to his challenge with my own commentary later in this issue.

Finally, in the Conference Showcase feature, a slot that acknowledges the highest scoring submitted abstract, Prudence Dalrymple, an EBLIP veteran, drew parallels with evidence based healthcare in her plenary, “Applying Evidence to Practice: Gaps, Barriers and Lessons Learned from Healthcare”. Even those with a significant pedigree within this particular sphere of evidence based practice had much to learn and appreciate from her fascinating chronicle, briefly summarised within her own commentary.

Of course, in addition to the plenary sessions there was a plethora of stimulating, innovative and creative presentations in the parallel sessions. I have no doubt that you will welcome the inclusion of these in future issues of *EBLIP*, assuming that their authors respond to Jonathan Eldredge’s challenge by identifying a Virtual Peer Mentor to help them see their projects through to publication!

So much for the “bones” of the EBLIP5 Stockholm conference. What of its spirit? As briefly attested elsewhere, several serendipitous themes have emerged to shape the possible future configuration of EBLIP – EBLIP five-point-zero, if you like. These include the reconceptualization of evidence based practice as a team-based endeavour requiring a different set of 5As from the established orthodoxy (i.e., Articulate, Accumulate, Assess, Agree and Adapt) (Booth, 2009). Furthermore, there is a strong sense of the iterative nature of a process that has been previously presented as a sequential and logical succession of separate steps, reflecting our social science stimulated reflection on the complexity of the real world. Finally there seems increasing awareness of the need to situate the evidence based practice movement within the wider issues facing our profession, both for reasons of sustainability and to stimulate exciting possibilities of synergy and cross-fertilisation. At the very least, EBLIP5 has been a stepping stone, if not an actual bridge, to a new and widening perspective on the paradigm.

Trying to characterise a conference by its academic programme alone is akin to mounting trophy animal heads upon a wall. A more appropriate analogy is the photo-safari, and certainly the Flickr conference photostream provides ample evidence of the conviviality and energy of the event as a whole

<<http://www.flickr.com/photos/eblip5/>>.

However, even this vivid pictorial record does scant testimony to the prodigious efforts of Lotta Haglund and her local team in delivering the entire conference, workshops and social events included, with consummate

professionalism. As Co-Chair of the International Programme Committee I would once again formally like to thank Lotta and her apparently tireless colleagues.

Roll on 2011 and... the Manchester Meerkat! While addition of meerkats to an inventory of big game animals serves to stretch impossibly the bounds of credulity, it does perhaps reflect that a different paradigm for conference delivery beckons. Meerkats are extremely social animals with avid curiosities. To survive, meerkats must live in groups for protection, as the desert presents many challenges. Each meerkat has an important, role to perform. I sincerely hope, and indeed believe, that a new era of EBLIP as a collective, social phenomenon awaits on the horizon!

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